



Paul J. Diodati
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
251 Causeway Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 626.1520
Fax (617) 626.1509



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Contact: Jennifer Flagg (617) 626-1022

Satellite Tag Releases Prematurely From White Shark *Researchers Hopeful that Other Tagging Opportunities will Occur*

Days after a large female white shark was coaxed from a shallow embayment in the Elizabethan Island chain near Woods Hole, Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (*MarineFisheries*) received satellite signals that suggested the high-tech tag placed on the 1,700 pound female white shark on September 23, 2004 released too soon.

MarineFisheries, is now convinced satellite information sent by the archival tag placed on the great white shark clearly indicates that the tag had detached. "We are disappointed that the satellite tag has released from the white shark prematurely," said Greg Skomal, the *MarineFisheries*' Biologist and shark expert who tagged the shark. "We will not get the information regarding this white shark that we had hoped for, but we did learn a lot during the time we studied the shark and we hope to learn more about other white sharks through future tagging efforts."

The tag was programmed to release from the fish on April 1, 2005 and should not have been transmitting to the satellite until that date. After a thorough analysis of the data retrieved from the tag, *MarineFisheries* personnel concluded that the tag detached ahead of time due to the lengthy period the shark spent in the shallow embayment.

An internal mechanism within the tag allows the tag to detect changes in depth and if those changes are not large or frequent, the tag "thinks" that the fish is dead and initiates detachment. Unfortunately, the shallow water encountered by the shark during the last three days of confinement caused the tag to initiate detachment and it floated to the surface and began transmitting data. With the early release of the tag, additional information from this great white shark is not likely.

The appearance of this great white off Woods Hole has resulted in a significant increase in the exchange of information between *MarineFisheries*' staff, other researchers, fishermen and the general public regarding white sharks. *MarineFisheries* is confident that the exchange of information will continue and they will be informed if other large sharks are sighted in coastal waters in the future providing further opportunities for tagging and research.

In addition, *MarineFisheries* is using the archival satellite tags in critical research about the movements and habitat use of the endangered North Atlantic right whale. On September 24th, *MarineFisheries* scientists and researchers from the University of New England successfully tagged two basking sharks, which while completely different species from right whales, share remarkable similarities in their seasonal habitat preferences. This ecological overlap affords scientists a unique opportunity to increase their knowledge of right whale movements without potentially harming or harassing the endangered right whales. The two recently tagged basking sharks should release their tags on January 31, 2005, and *MarineFisheries* researchers look forward to the information they will gather, which should prove extremely valuable in important management efforts concerning the endangered right whale.

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